Synopsis

RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND VALUES IN INDIA

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Synopsis

One of the serious challenges facing mankind in organized social life is ethics; that is, the problem of choice between good and bad, do's and do not's etc. All the creations in this natural world follow certain fixed laws of nature. That is why one can exactly predict when the sun will rise tomorrow. But nobody can predict human behaviour in the same way. Nobody can confidently say that two individuals would behave in the same way tomorrow as they do today, because man has been endowed with the freedom to decide, which other creations do not possess. That is why philosophers and scholars have emphasized ethical development of human beings to ensure rational behaviour in society. Ethics, which is a major branch of philosophy, encompasses right conduct and good life. It is significantly broader than the common conception of analyzing right and wrong. A central aspect of ethics is "the good life", the life worth living or life that is simply satisfying, which is held by many philosophers to be more important than traditional moral conduct.

Standards of right and wrong:

Ethics is two things. First, ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose the reasonable

obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty, compassion, and loyalty. And, ethical standards include standards relating to rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom from injury, and the right to privacy. Such standards are adequate standards of ethics because they are supported by consistent and well-founded reasons.

Secondly, ethics refers to the study and development of one's ethical standards. As mentioned above, feelings, laws, and social norms can deviate from what is ethical. So it is necessary to constantly examine one's standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well-founded. Ethics also means, then, the continuous effort of studying our own moral beliefs and our moral conduct, and striving to ensure that we, and the institutions we help to shape, live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly-based. The significance of ethical formulations, today, as in all times, is in their power for shaping attitudes and constraining behaviors.

The philosophy of ethics and values can protect the society from the onslaughts of the social evils. The idea of ethics and values is to be adopted by all forms of governments and all agencies of the societies. Right from the ancient to the modern days the man relies on ethics and values which can make him to adjust with the society. The economic balances, social equality, political unity democratic tendencies and granting rights can be brought only by ethics and values.

Secular ethics:

Secular ethics is a branch of moral philosophy in which ethics is based solely on human faculties such as logic, reason or moral intuition, and not derived from purported supernatural revelation or guidance (which is the source of religious ethics). Secular ethics comprises any ethical system that does not draw on the supernatural, such as humanism, secularism and freethinking.

The majority of secular moral systems accept either the normativity of social contracts, some form of attribution of intrinsic moral value, intuition-based deontology, or cultural moral relativism. A smaller minority believe scientific reasoning can reveal moral truth. This is known as science of morality. Approaches like utilitarianism, subjective moral relativism, and ethical egoism are less common, but still maintain a significant following among secular ethicists. Little attention is paid to the positions of moral skepticism and moral nihilism; however, many religious and some secular ethicists believe that secular morality cannot exist without a god or gods to provide ontological grounding, or is at least impossible to apprehend apart from authoritative revelation.

Secular ethics frameworks do not necessarily contradict theological value systems. For example, the Golden Rule or a commitment to non-violence could be supported by those within religious and secular

frameworks. Secular ethics systems can also vary within the societal and cultural norms of a specific time period.

Secular ethics and religion:

There are those who state that religion is not necessary for moral behavior at all. Those who are unhappy with the negative orientation of traditional religious ethics believe that prohibitions can only set the absolute limits of what a society is willing to tolerate from people at their worst, not guide them towards achieving their best. In other words, someone who follows all these prohibitions has just barely avoided being a criminal, not acted as a positive influence on the world. They conclude that rational ethics can lead to a fully expressed ethical life, while religious prohibitions are insufficient. That does not mean secular ethics and religion are mutually exclusive. In fact, many principles, such as the Golden Rule, are present in both systems, and some religious people, as well as some Deists, prefer to adopt a rational approach to ethics.

The philosophy of morality is ethics. A moral code is a system of morality (according to a particular philosophy, religion, culture, etc.) and a moral is any one practice or teaching within a moral code. Morality may also be specifically synonymous with "goodness" or "rightness." Immorality is the active opposition to morality (i.e. opposition to that which is good or right), while amorality is variously defined as an unawareness of, indifference toward, or disbelief in any set of moral standards or principles.

An example of a moral code is the Golden Rule which states that, "One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself."

Ethics is that branch of philosophy which addresses questions about morality. The word 'ethics' is "commonly used interchangeably with 'morality' ... and sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group, or individual." Likewise, certain types of ethical theories, especially deontological ethics (It is sometimes described as "duty" or "obligation" or "rule" -based ethics, because rules "bind you to your duty"), sometimes distinguish between 'ethics' and 'morals': "Although the morality of people and their ethics amounts to the same thing, there is a usage that restricts morality to systems, based on notions such as duty, obligation, and principles of conduct, reserving ethics for the approach to practical reasoning, based on the notion of a virtue, and generally avoiding the separation of 'moral' considerations from other practical considerations."

Globalization has created many ethical problems that are beginning to surface with greater force. First, there is a new phenomenon of individualism, which is challenging the social cohesion and extended family system. Second, the newly emerging employment patterns and the demands of the corporations upon their employees have been placing new strains on the family. As in the West, the emerging patterns make the

employee an “adjusted person.” Asian cultures always have valued sacrificial love for one’s family and adherence to basic traditional values.

The need for cultural analysis and a communal ethics is urgent. The family always has borne the brunt of social welfare in these societies by looking after the young and the elderly, without institutionalizing them. The need for a proactive strategy to deal with the crisis of the elderly never can be ignored. The ethics that deals with transnational problems must be collaborative and life-affirming, which sees people as more important than profit.

The First Chapter, ‘Introduction’ presents the nature of ethics and its origin of historical perspectives in Indian religions and culture.

The Second Chapter ‘Values and Ethics in Hinduism’ deals with how ancient Indian seers recognized a cosmic order which served as the foundation of ethics and values. According to *Vedic Dharma* monogamy, sharing love and affection sacrifice giving respect to elders which are the main principles that are enunciated by *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata. Bhagvad-Gītā* represents a unique synthesis of action, devotion, and knowledge. Man is complex of intellect, will and emotion; he is a being who thinks wills and feels. Intellect has given rise to the philosophy of knowledge; will to the philosophy of action; and emotion to the philosophy of devotion.

The Third Chapter 'Buddhist Ethics' explains the philosophy of Buddhism as one of the eminent philosophies by which entire world has been emancipated. The thought of ethics and values can be considered as a vehicle from which *Buddha Dharma* (*Dhamma*) has been derived.

The Fourth Chapter 'Ethics and Values in Jainism' discusses philosophy of ethics and values of the Jains. Mahavīra who was regarded as the reformer of Jainism has produced immense thought of ethics and values through his teachings. The Non-violence, disclosing the truth, *ahiṁsā* and *brahmacharya* and not having desire on the body are the main principles of Jainism. The *Parisita Parva* and other Jain texts have vividly expressed the Jain thought of *Karma*, Jain thought of metaphysics, and ethical view point of Jain *Thirthānkarās*.

The Fifth Chapter 'Contemporary Indian Thinkers on Ethics and Values' presents the views of contemporary thinkers like, Vivekananda, Gandhi, S. Radhakrishnan and others, on ethics and Values.

The Sixth Chapter 'Ethics and Values in Christianity and Islam' includes the Christian and Islamic religious principles which are based on the idea of ethics and values. In order to understand Christian practice, one must realize the importance of the conception of man. The essence of the *Quran* is its moral and spiritual values, and the *Quran* and tradition have laid special stress on this.

The seventh Chapter ‘Summary’ presents the essence of all the chapters so that the various aspects of ethics and values have been examined and presented with critical observation.